

Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities



Public Testimony

January 15, 2008
Juneau, Alaska

MR. BOYNTON: First one, Tom

Leigh-Kendall, is that correct.

MR. KENDALL: Hi, my name is Tom

Leigh-Kendall, born here in Juneau, raised here. I sought help through DVR. I have mental health issues, bipolar, high anxiety, and stress, it's also substance abuse issues related to my stress and anxiety.

I sought DVR to try and help me get back into the job market. I worked with Beau Kelly. He's been an immense help in taking a lot of the stress and anxiety out of what it is I'm trying to -- with the direction I'm trying to go with my life.

I have a support team with my JAMI

counselor, a GH substance abuse counselor, Michelle, who is a job placement counselor, and Beau has been very good about working hand in hand with everybody and trying to outline what my goals are and what it is that I want to do, suggesting different job markets and what I might be comfortable with with my abilities.

Through their help in the last month I've been able to register out at UAS. I'm taking four classes out there now, so I'm a full-time student taking automotive technologies in a two-year certificate course. I feel good for once in my life that I'm going in the right direction, and I feel like I have a lot of support to help me out. Like I said, they have been an immense help in communicating with me and just kind of easing the transition through all this.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you, appreciate that.

MS. GEISLER: Good luck.

MR. BOYNTON: Do we have anybody on line, Velja?

MS. ELSTAD: This is the Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities and we're taking public testimony today. Is there anybody on line that would like to testify?

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, Martha Keeling, did

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I pronounce that right?

MS. KEELING: Yeah. Do I hold this?

Well, I'm from Kentucky, and I worked all my life, so when I came here I ended up getting my -- because I'm nervous, I don't like to talk in a crowd of people.

When I came here -- I worked as a CNA back home, and I came here, I got my license, but a couple years back my disc came out of my spine, so I ended up running into Vanessa, and what she does to help me, so -- I'm sorry, I'm so nervous.

MR. BOYNTON: That's okay.

MS. ELSTAD: You're doing good.

MR. BOYNTON: It's okay.

MS. KEELING: They have been helping me out with a lot of stuff. My goals in life, because I don't want to be -- because when I got my -- when I ended up hurting my back real bad someone asked me, was I going on disability? And I said no, because I wanted to work for a living. And I'm no alcoholic, I'm no drug user. I'm really, really nervous, you guys.

MS. BUCKMEIER: Just take your time.

MS. KEELING: Because I've never talked in front of a bunch of people in my whole life.

MS. GEISLER: You're doing good.

MS. KEELING: And they told me I have a soft heart because I can cry in an instant, and that's the reason I cry so much because I can cry -- because I hate to watch love stories.

But Vanessa and her bunch, DVR has been helping me a whole lot to do what I want to. I want to write a kids' book, and Vanessa is helping me to

prove to myself that I wasn't stupid or dumb. I took tutoring classes so I could go back to school to do something with my life. I like to work with kids some of the time, but not all the time, because I have kids, and I volunteer myself to work. I live in Cedar Park, so I volunteer help out in their art class with Jim all the time, so I do do something.

But I want, you know -- but it's really hard to live in Juneau because you all got -- it's really high to live here, and you have to have two incomes. So the DVR is helping me get back on my feet so I can be a paid taxpayer to make sure you all are doing your jobs right.

So I don't know what else I can say to you all, just to make sure you all keep it going, because I really do need it and there is a lot of other people out there that do need it.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you, so much.

MS. KEELING: And I want to prove to you that I'm not a drug user, I don't drink or do drugs, and there is people out there like me that needs it,

okay. I'm sorry.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you, so much.

MS. GEISLER: I'm reading this testimony that was sent in. Dear sirs, my name is Vern Thompson, my education is in creative writing. I suffer from cerebral palsy and schizophrenia, the schizophrenia is under control, I just need drug monitoring from my neurologist. I requested VR services in getting my poems, my poetry manuscripts and my picture book published. They have helped me join the professional writers organization as well as writer's materials, made sure my computer is always in good working condition so I can do my research, and helped me look for work tutoring in the schools.

Since then I've had a number of poems published in literary magazines. I've always sent my manuscripts to book publishers. I'm waiting to hear from them. Currently I lead a local writers' group that meets weekly. I'm a member of a children's literature writers group that meets monthly. VR has been a great help to me in getting published and

getting involved with other writers. And this is from

Vern Thompson. Kate Smith is the vocational counselor here.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you.

MS. ELSTAD: Is there a Jim, John, is
and is it -- what's your last name.

JOAN: It's Joan. I'm Joan, I have a
disability, and it is comprehension in English, that
was the hardest part throughout school and everything.
I've had an IEP throughout high school and everything.
And right after high school they showed me DVR who
helped out. And I started going to college, but that
wasn't what I wanted to do, which wasn't helping. So
I took some time off and decided to come back, and I
figured out what I wanted to do, and they have always
been there to help out to figure out what I wanted,
nursing or radiology.

So I'm going back to class, and they got
me a laptop, they are getting me a scanner and printer
so I can do all that kind of stuff, getting programs
that will go on to help me learn everything I need to

learn, and they are connecting me to other people who can help me out.

They also did interviews, I did interviews with the radiologists here, went through Bartlett, showed me everything on that area, if I wanted to go through that route and RN nursing, because I did CNA work, and they helped me get my certificate, like books on tape and monitor tests. So they have always been is there to help me with what I need. That's pretty much it. And all the people that work there are great.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you.

MS. ELSTAD: Thank you.

MR. BOYNTON: Jackie Stewart.

JACKIE STEWART: Hi, my name is Jackie Stewart I'm the director of the Juneau Small Business Development Center. I've been working for several years with DVR in helping clients who are interested in pursuing self-employment. And right now I'm working with Margie Thompson and have worked with quite a few of the counselors including Beau Kelly and Jane Pringle, who have been mentioned, who have been

very active and proactive in working with clients in starting businesses.

So I really appreciate the attempt of DVR to put together a really strong policy to go back over some of that paperwork that has been provided. And I appreciate the way that the household expenses have been separated from the business expenses, which is very, very important. I feel that you've done an excellent job at putting together this policy. I just wanted to point out a couple of small corrections, and then kind of throw out one question for you to consider.

On page 6 where it talks about the different tiers and the funding, I'll let you get to that page, it seems to me that the calculation is such that the maximum amount that DVR would be putting in to a self-employment plan as far as helping to fund the plan would be \$5,000. So when I do the calculation, if I multiply, for example, 20,000 times -- no, that's not right. Oh, yeah, is that correct? Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah, 25 percent of

20,000 would be 5,000. And I can understand DVR cannot be a bank to a business, and it's important for business owners to find other sources of funds.

I think the last line where it says over 50,000 there, it says 5 percent of 10,000, I think that's supposed to be 5 percent of a hundred thousand, because that would bring you to the 5,000. Does everyone see that? I believe that's an error. So I think that whole line needs to be reviewed there.

In my working with entrepreneurs, one of the difficult things is to find financing, and in particular people with disabilities, whether they have been disabled on the job or they have got a long-term disability, quite often people are low income, and for this reason it's very, very difficult for them to get bank loans, because bank loans require collateral. So I just want to really encourage you to look carefully at that tier 2, because the sources of funding that I'm aware of that they could apply for would be potentially the Mental Health Trust funds at a maximum of 10,000, and possibly a PASS plan if they are on Social Security Disability. But I want you to just

think clearly about what's the maximum DVR could put in, because most businesses, even if it's a service-based business, require several thousand dollars. And I can't really think of any business I've worked with that started for \$4,000.

So even one that Beau Kelly and I worked on recently, it was just basically a service business, and I believe it was about \$6,000 to get that started. But in working with this individual who had been physically disabled on a job, I don't think he had any potential other sources of funding. So just something for you to look out for. I encourage you to look at the funding levels again.

On page 11, it discusses the plan being approved by an outside agency. I see Small Business Development Center is on there. We provide assistance to individuals in putting together their plan. We are not in the position to be approving plans and saying that this is a sound plan. We had a banker who was going to be serving on the board with Start Up Alaska, and he simply had a difficult time finding time in his

schedule to review business plans that were outside of his scope of work.

We did attempt to work with SCORE, and which is service core of retired executives. I think it would be wonderful if we could set them up. They are really the only organization I'm familiar with that is in the position that they could review plans. But ultimately I don't think anyone is going to be in the position of saying yes, this is a sound plan. It's very difficult. And so that's an area I would be glad to work with you on kind of strategizing how can we get these plans reviewed by maybe a group of people who can point out challenges or that, yes, this does look like it's a solid plan. But ultimately it's going to be up to DVR to decide if they want to move forward in funding this plan. So just another area for you to look at.

Just a small edit on appendix B, beginning to develop your plan, at the bottom, 9 B, I think it's supposed to say Small Business Development Center instead of Program. And those are the only things I wanted to add.

MR. BURTON: What page was that?

SPEAKER: It's on appendix B at the bottom, and it said: Have you contacted the following resources, Microbusiness Development Program or Small Business Development Program.

And I believe that's Small Business Development Center. And we're willing to work with DVR clients and we enjoy doing that. And it's very satisfying when we can help people become self-employed, particularly because self-employment is a way that individuals can really fit a business to their needs, as I'm sure that you're all aware. So thank you very much for your time.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you. Velja, do we have anyone on line?

MS. ELSTAD: This is the Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, we're taking public testimony today. Is there anybody on line that would like to testify?

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, Rose Cappa.

ROSE CAPP: Hello everyone, my name is

Rose Cappa, and I moved here --

MR. BURTON: Excuse me.

ROSE CAPP: From Iowa.

MR. BURTON: Can you move the mic closer
to you?

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, go ahead.

ROSE CAPP: So before I moved here --
last December 1st is when I moved, and I've been
looking for a job. Before I was looking for one for
two years in Iowa, didn't have any luck, it was very
frustrating for me. No one would have an interview
with me. A few applications came back, but it was
just, ah. Then I thought, okay, I could live here
because I've lived here before, so I knew they would
help, but Iowa DVR was just not too good. There was
no funding, nothing was available to support and help
me. So I was very frustrated.

So I came back here and I saw that DVR
showed me honest help. And I thought, wow, that's
very impressive, and I was happy that they could help

me. They showed me the rules and regulations and things, so that really -- I appreciate that so much for all of you, for the help, and that's all. Thank you.

MR. BOYNTON: Tom O'Brien.

TOM O'BRIEN: Hi, my name is Tom O'Brien. Currently I'm a homeless disabled Vietnam Veteran. Matter of fact, I've been homeless for about four-and-a-half months now. I had the rug pulled out from underneath me. My place got condemned from where I was renting, I lost my job the next day, laid off due to lack of work. They advised I was one of the last to go. And I had mouth surgery about two weeks later where they had a fix a place in my gum tissue, they had to open it up and clean out my sinuses and pull it back together and stitch it back up. I couldn't chew too good for three weeks, lost about 25 pounds. I was sleeping in my van.

So far I haven't found one entity, government resources or otherwise that helps get disabled veterans, homeless, back on their feet. And

I'm having to crawl and scrape for whatever I have.

I've been turned down by Public Assistance twice. One for food stamps the other for monies. And I do have unemployment coming in, it was \$174, now it's up to \$246. But I just passed my waiting week.

But of anybody that's helped me over the years, it's been DVR, that's one thing I can say. I had lung surgery four or five years ago this January where they took out part of my lung. I was already considered a disabled veteran, Vietnam Veteran, prior to that, but I decided to change trades. I was a paper hanger for 25 years with the Painters' Union, but because of stress and because of traffic and because of my issue with my lung, I knew I couldn't keep up with others anymore.

I came up here and became a driver, however being a tour driver doesn't help me through the winter, and unemployment insurance never has been enough to -- I can't call it a living wage. I decided that I needed some help, and I went to seek Jim Swanson, and he helped hook up a joint venture

together for me. I wanted to become an operating engineer and truck driver. I wanted to upgrade to a Class A CDL. So DVR essentially sent me to truck driving school up in Anchorage, six week course, and also paid for the 40 hour hazwoper class, it's a hazardous material course. And then the VA took over and they pretty much paid for the heavy equipment end.

However, the truck driving school I went to was part of the Teamsters basically, they are the ones that operated it, and so it was a good truck driving school, but I wasn't much cut out for heavy equipment, it was kind of a secondary thing.

At any rate, I put in a couple hundred applications and resumes over the last years, and I've never gotten a return e-mail back from an employer yet. Came to find out that I may be too old. I know we got that over 40 law, but that doesn't matter, they don't have to e-mail you back. Nobody has to e-mail you back and say, hey, you're too old or you're not too old or you've got a disability, we can't take care of you.

Today I started school, classes last

week. DVR, Beau Kelly set me up with a private employment specialist. I started classes over here at SERRC downtown, that's where I'm on my way to right after this meeting, and taking Microsoft Word and Excel, because it seems about every time I pull up a job description over at Job Center they call for that, you know, and I need to stay up with the times. But whether this is going to land me a job, I don't know.

Basically I took these courses in Anchorage, so I was kind of focused on the Kensington mine. There was so much setbacks, and of course there was that age issue I'm sure again. Nobody wants to put anybody on a half a million dollar piece of heavy equipment and have them run it at entry level without going through an apprenticeship.

I went to see Terry Miller over at Teamsters a few years ago right after school, you know, when I came back from Anchorage, and he says, we can't help you at all, you know. In order to be a heavy equipment operator in our union, you just have to have a doctor's degree before we'll even consider

you for an interview, that's what I was told.

Well, basically I'm looking to get some more help from DVR. A lot of times they can't give me the help I needed. For instance, you know, I still have to get around from school to the Job Center to different places. For instance, I have two appointments at Bartlett Hospital, another one over at Alaska Housing. And next week I guess they are only allowed to give a person as much what it would cost for a bus pass for gasoline, DVR. And \$40 now, how long is that going to last in gas as high as gas prices are. I didn't get paid for anything on that claim week, it's waiting week. It's kind of put me behind again.

So I'll pull myself together, hopefully I'll get what I need out of DVR once again. But I went around to all these different places, you know, Public Assistance, and I'm trying to seek help. And what's crossed my mind is maybe there should be some kind of a neutral person or entity out here, you know, somebody comes up like myself, they know where to go.

I mean, I never knew there was a coalition for the homeless. They didn't help me, though. And I didn't know much about Public Assistance, I thought DVR was through with me.

But I started out by going to Job Center and the counselor, guidance counselor over there directed me towards Alaska Housing. He pointed me towards Public Assistance and finally DVR. I probably should have gone to them first. But that's just the way life is. Thanks.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you. Do we have anybody on line?

MS. ELSTAD: Is there anybody on line that would like to testify to the Governor's Committee today?

MR. BOYNTON: Is there anybody in the -- we have everybody. Okay. Well, we're going to be on record until 5, so...

MS. ELSTAD: If you want to break for a bit, I can man the phones and Carol can man the door and if anybody comes in we'll reconvene.

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, if you want to have a cup of coffee or whatnot, and then we'll reconvene just a little bit before 5 and then we can close after that.

(Break)

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, Brenda Stearns, is that correct, thank you?

BRENDA STEARNS: Yeah, I just felt like being here I just wanted to take the chance to say the good things that DVR has done, and I don't have anybody to interpret for right now, so I might as well.

I worked here in Alaska for a little over two years now, I moved from Ohio, and the services that DVR has offered I've had contact with through my job as an interpreter for the deaf. And so much help, so much available for them, it has been just so great to see. You know, they have ideas and they have dreams, and to be able to bounce those off of someone that can guide them and give them opportunities is just wonderful and just practical help of how to get hearing aids and TTYs just to make

their life livable, that we take for granted that our communication is so easy, but theirs, they are running into blocks all the time. So it's a great service that's someplace they can go.

And another thing that is wonderful, it's very personable. In Ohio you sit for at least an hour on a hard plastic chair and you're just a number. They are burned out. And here you're brought right in and it's just wonderful the kind service.

I also have a son that has a disability, and while he lived here he had help through DVR, Kay Smith and Jim Swanson and Dave, I can't remember his last name, but they were all just available whenever he needed help. He has schizoaffective mood disorder, but when another guy can step in that's not mom, it makes such a difference. They helped guide him to fill out a resume, just put his life together on paper, it was phenomenal, and helped him get his job. And he tried over a year in Ohio to get a job, but a very short time he got a job here, and it was great, perfect match, and it was just great help. And I'm so

appreciative to all of them. And I didn't cry this year.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you very much.

Jerome Hems.

JEROME ELDEMER: It's Eldemer. I've been in the program 15 years, single father, raised my daughter since she was 4 months old. I worked with Carol the first year and then after that I went through Beau Kelly and then after that I went to Jim Swanson. They all helped me identify what was my problem. My disability was reading and writing and comprehension after I got done reading the material. They helped me get into programs like get me a tutor, something with the schooling so I can learn more on computer programs and stuff.

Right now I'm looking for work. I was employed for six-and-a-half years at Oliver's Trophies after I finished the program a couple years ago, but that's ended, and now I'm looking for new work.

My capabilities are I'm really good with my hands. You can show me something and I can put it together or make something for you, where other

people, from what I hear, is they have to go to school and learn how to use a carving tool or use a stethoscope or something like that.

I'm looking forward to getting into a new line of work right now with Beau and working with my other counselor. She's been a great help. Her name is Carol -- no, Karen, I'm sorry, Karen. And she's helped me put together my work resume all the capability things I can do, the schooling I have I went through. And right now I'm just waiting to hear back from a couple other people in the job market, and they are interested in meeting with me because they are telling my counselor that we got to send people to college to learn how to do things like this, and here you've got just a natural ability.

And it's nice to have something like that, because when I got out there trying to do this on my own and stuff, and it was hard because of having a reading disability, was hard for me to explain that to somebody without knowing them. Just looking at me, you think he can go through college book like that.

It's not like that, it's hard. I have to struggle just to get through it. And then when I get through it, I'm like, what did I just read? It's kind of hard. That's part of the things that I've been through in my life.

But now that I have these counselors and my advocates to help me go through things and ask them questions, why did they mean this or what was this about, and then they give me a little more input on it, it was like, oh, geez, okay, I understand now. It's more easier than sitting there across the table from somebody I didn't know, and do you understand me, and without trying to be embarrassed and say, oh, yeah, I understand, I got it, but all the time never understood it because I didn't have an advocate that would say, let me explain it to you another way, some other different way.

Right now I'm just waiting to get back to work and excited, and these people are excited to meet me as soon as they get back together with my counselor and stuff. They are going through their little circle right now trying to put things together

and learn where I can go with their job market and how they can help me to help myself be a more productive father. I've been raising her, my daughter, like I said, 15 years now. And she was excited when I got my first job. It took me a long time because she -- always I would stay home and take care of her, and when I got my first job with Oliver's Trophies she was just tickled pink because she knew she would be getting allowances after that for all the hard work she's been doing in school.

I explained to her the schooling she needs and to better her life in school so that she wouldn't have the problems that I have. She doesn't have the problems I have with disabilities and reading and writing, but she understands that people in life have problems, and it's not for us to stand up and ridicule these people, but to stand up and help them and help guide them to where they need to be, and she's doing really good at that. She's making As and Bs right now, and she's in high school right now, and I owe her a lot because I promised her that for every

A she gets she gets a hundred dollars, and every B she gets 50 bucks, that's the way I work, I don't know how everybody else works, but she's doing a good job at it. And I'd like to say thank you for the program and that's all I have to say.

MR. BOYNTON: Thank you very much.

MS. ELSTAD: Is there anybody on line that would like to testify today? No.

MR. BOYNTON: Okay, well, we just got a few more minutes, so does anybody have any comments or anything over the day's activities?

MS. GEISLER: I'll make a comment. This was great public testimony. I think that Southeast Alaska's branch of DVR needs to be really proud because there was some really great things being said about services, so it's nice to hear. Appreciate the folks that came out, it's hard to do.

MS. ELSTAD: And Southeast is a rather young region, too, so to have that quality and provide that type of service says a lot, I think.

MR. BOYNTON: Is there anything we can do to help the new members?

MS. ELSTAD: This is the Governor's

Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People
With Disabilities and we're taking public testimony.

Is there anybody on line that would like to testify.

SPEAKER: Yeah, I would like to testify.

MS. ELSTAD: Thank you for calling in.

Can I get your name, please?

CARLTON GOOD: My name is Carlton Good.

MS. ELSTAD: Where are you?

CARLTON GOOD: Right now I'm in Seward.

MS. ELSTAD: Thank you for calling in,
and the Committee is ready to hear your testimony.

CARLTON GOOD: Well, about four years
ago, maybe three, I really was having a hard time
getting a job, and keeping -- getting anything
permanent. So I went in Ketchikan and saw Alice and
Dave, and they got me in a training mode and sent me
to school. I took the DCNA program and also got my
Associate's in arts degree there in Ketchikan and a
little bit of it in Juneau as well.

Then when I was in Juneau Beau Kelly
helped me figure out how to get an internship in the

Goldbelt Building, and I did that over the summer and it was a real learning experience. I was able to apply what I learned and really changed my career.

I'm 47 years old and all I've ever done in my life is drive truck and be a security guard and a drop out, and today I have an AA degree and I'm working towards a Bachelor's degree. And then at the end of the summer I was able to get a job with the State. I work at Spring Creek Correctional Center, and Louann Madison and Barb both helped me figure out how to get it and how to get here and all. And I really believe with all my heart that I would still be having troubles getting work today if I hadn't been able to get a little bit of help, or a lot a bit of help with these programs. I would not be where I am today if I did not have access to these programs because there was no way I could do it. It cost too much money and I didn't really see the future that way.

And one thing I would remark about Alice Rock, who passed away now, she really had some vision.

And Beau Kelly, he just really had me to aim my sights higher, and I'm proud of them. They were good people because they did above and beyond what the State calls for in an employee, they really gave me a vision.

MS. ELSTAD: Great. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to call in today, Carlton.

CARLTON GOOD: You have a good day and I encourage you to support all these programs and do what you can.